

# **Exhibit A**

7/25/2018

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An intimate look at identity in America

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[Late-Term Abortion Patients](#)  
[Local Photographers](#)  
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**COMMUNITIES**

# Two DACAmented Dreamers, In Alaska And Texas, On Fighting To Stay Home

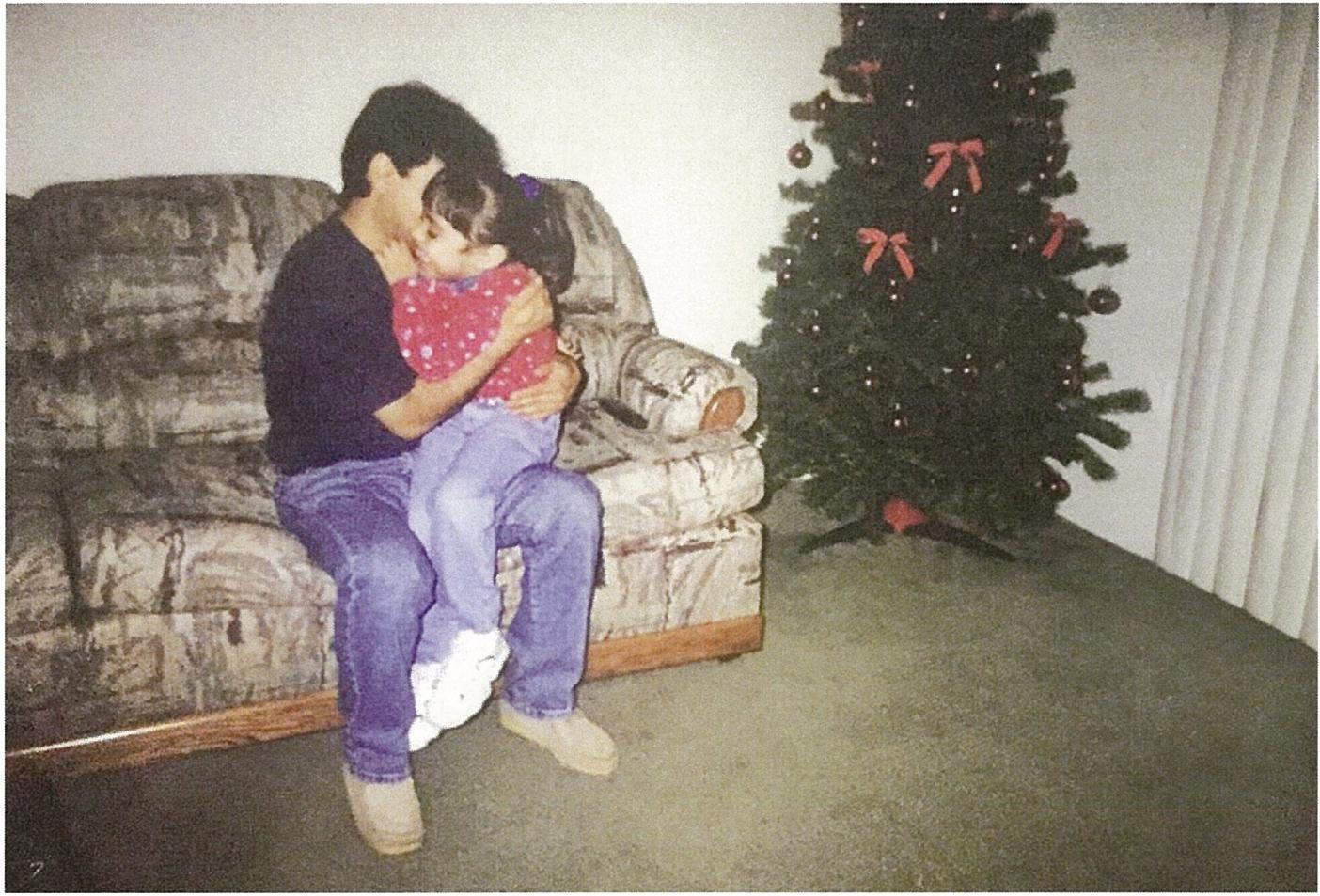
Karla and Ana describe overcoming shame and risking it all for a chance at their American dream.

By Carolina Moreno

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7/25/2018

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COURTESY OF KARLA PEREZ

Karla Perez, as a child, with her dad at Christmastime.

Welcome to *"The Story We Share,"* a series of Q&As that profile two people with similar identities — but who live in very different places. As part of HuffPost's Listen To America tour, we're exploring how people's lived experiences overlap and diverge depending on their zip codes. What is the "American experience"? It depends where you look.

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The Trump administration's recent decision to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program has cast a dark shadow on the futures of young undocumented immigrants, or "Dreamers," in the United States.

DACA, which was first implemented in 2012, granted nearly 800,000 Dreamers temporary reprieve from deportation and made them eligible for a work permit. On Sept. 5, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the program would be phased out over a period of six months and it would be Congress' responsibility to help find a solution for Dreamers.

For more than a decade, Dreamers have been fighting for a more permanent solution, including several failed attempts to pass 2001's Dream Act, so doubts remain about whether

7/25/2018

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Congress will act favorably in time.

Until then, DACAmended Dreamers, like 24-year-old Karla Perez from Houston, plan to continue fighting. The third-year law student at the University of Houston Law Center is one of the more than 124,000 DACA recipients in the state of Texas.

Ana, whose name has been changed to protect her and her family, leads a parallel life in Alaska. The college student from a mixed-status home is one of just over 130 DACA recipients in the state. And from the shadows, she's also working toward a chance at the American dream for her and thousands of other Dreamers.

Both Dreamers are in their 20s and migrated with their parents from Mexico as toddlers in the mid-1990s. Still, the thousands of miles between them have guaranteed vastly different experiences dealing with their undocumented status.

Read on to learn more about these young Dreamers' lives, struggles and hopes in their America.



COURTESY OF KARLA PEREZ

Karla Perez speaks with a megaphone during a rally.

**HuffPost: Why did your parents decide to leave Mexico?**

**Karla (Texas):** I know just economically the circumstances were really dire. We depended largely on support from my grandfather, who by that time was already in the United States. My parents were having trouble having kids, it took them some time to have me, so once I was around they didn't want to raise me in a place that was as unsafe as Mexico City. It was also difficult for them to find employment. So there came a point when I guess they thought, "We're not going to be able to make it out here and we don't want this kind of life for our kid."

**Ana (Alaska):** They came from extreme, extreme poverty. They were raised by single moms. They didn't have a chance to go to school and they saw really no other good opportunities for themselves because they were just being sucked into a cycle of poverty, is what they've told me. When my dad lost the job that he had, they just didn't think they were going to be able to raise a family that wasn't going to be subjected to the same kind of poverty that they grew up in. They talk about home, but it almost feels like it's a little painful for them to speak about it.

**Do you remember anything from your family's journey to the U.S.?**

**Karla (Texas):** I feel like I remember that at one point we were in a stash house, in the house [where] you wait before your relatives pick you up. Because I remember being there with my parents and other women, and it was like really crowded. That's a memory that I've always had as a child.

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A few years ago, for a class project, my professor had me really speak to my parents and figure out what happened on our journey [across the border]. I got to talk to my parents about these things for the first time. It's difficult for my mom to talk about it. My dad talks even less about it because, for so many people, not just my parents, the process of migrating is fairly traumatic.

**Ana (Alaska):** I remember stepping off the plane, and I remember really clearly the shoes I was wearing — they were white little strappy sandals — but that's about the only thing.

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COURTESY OF KARLA PEREZ

Karla Perez, left, with her soccer club in 2010. As a high school junior, she turned down a full-ride soccer scholarship because she didn't want to tell the coach she couldn't travel due to her status.

### What did your parents tell you about being undocumented growing up?

**Karla (Texas):** I was always aware I was from Mexico but my status just didn't come up. My parents wanted me to be a very well-rounded person and I was always in art camps, ballet classes and soccer — soccer actually became really serious. It was my plan to play soccer in college and perhaps afterward. And they didn't want to make me feel like I couldn't do all these things that I was doing because of my status.

**Ana (Alaska):** I don't think they really needed to tell me anything. From a very young age I think I just kind of figured it out. Living in Alaska, so isolated from any other Latinos or any other sort of community, you kind of 1. can tell you don't belong and 2. really start to tell the difference between documented and undocumented families.

### Do you recall the moment you became self-aware of your undocumented status?

**Karla (Texas):** It really only came up in the beginning of high school when I was preparing for my driver's ed course and they needed a Social Security card. I got back home and I'm like, "Hey, Mom, I need my Social Security card. I need to take it to my next class." And my mom said, "We don't have one." I was so naive about those things because as a little kid when do

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you have to worry about needing a Social Security card? When it hit me really hard again was when I was applying for college; that whole process was incredibly confusing.

**Ana (Alaska):** I never really had a conversation with my parents but I did watch my dad when my grandma passed away. For a second I thought, "Well, of course you're going to go home and you're gonna go to the funeral and you're going to do everything that I see my friends' parents do when their parents pass away." And then it was realizing, "Well, they can't go back without being stuck there." I think that's when [at age 7], I really had a conversation with both of my parents, kind of detailing out more of the restrictions about what being undocumented really means. [It] was the first time I realized that this was gonna be a hard life.

## LISTEN TO AMERICA

— A HUFFPOST ROAD TRIP —

*HuffPost is hitting the road this fall to interview people about their hopes, dreams, fears — and what it means to be American today.*

### **What kind of internal struggles did you deal with when it came to being undocumented as a child or teen?**

**Karla (Texas):** I've always been a more cautious person about things, I guess that's just my personality. After finding out about my status, yes, there were barriers in front of me now because of the situation, but I was making it worse. If there was a scholarship and it didn't mention anything about status, I still wouldn't apply to it because I would freak out and think "Well, what if they ask me?" I began to not ask for help when I needed it because I didn't want anyone to know and I wanted to keep it to myself. I think it was just that fear of rejection that I think everybody has.

**Ana (Alaska):** During 2001 and beyond, the Dreamer movement really started growing, but I would have never known because the internet was just kind of becoming a thing and I was in Alaska. We weren't very well-off so I didn't have access to internet. So growing up you really have this feeling where you're separated from the rest of the world and you think you're so alone. It's a weird existence because had we stayed in California I would have been so reassured that this isn't ideal but I'm not alone. But being in Alaska, I think one of the biggest things, beyond all the limitations that come from being undocumented, is just an extreme feeling of loneliness.

### **Did you ever feel alienated because of your status or background at school or among your peers?**

**Karla (Texas):** I didn't know anyone else like me. I knew there were other undocumented kids in school but I didn't know people who maybe were on this college path or that I could

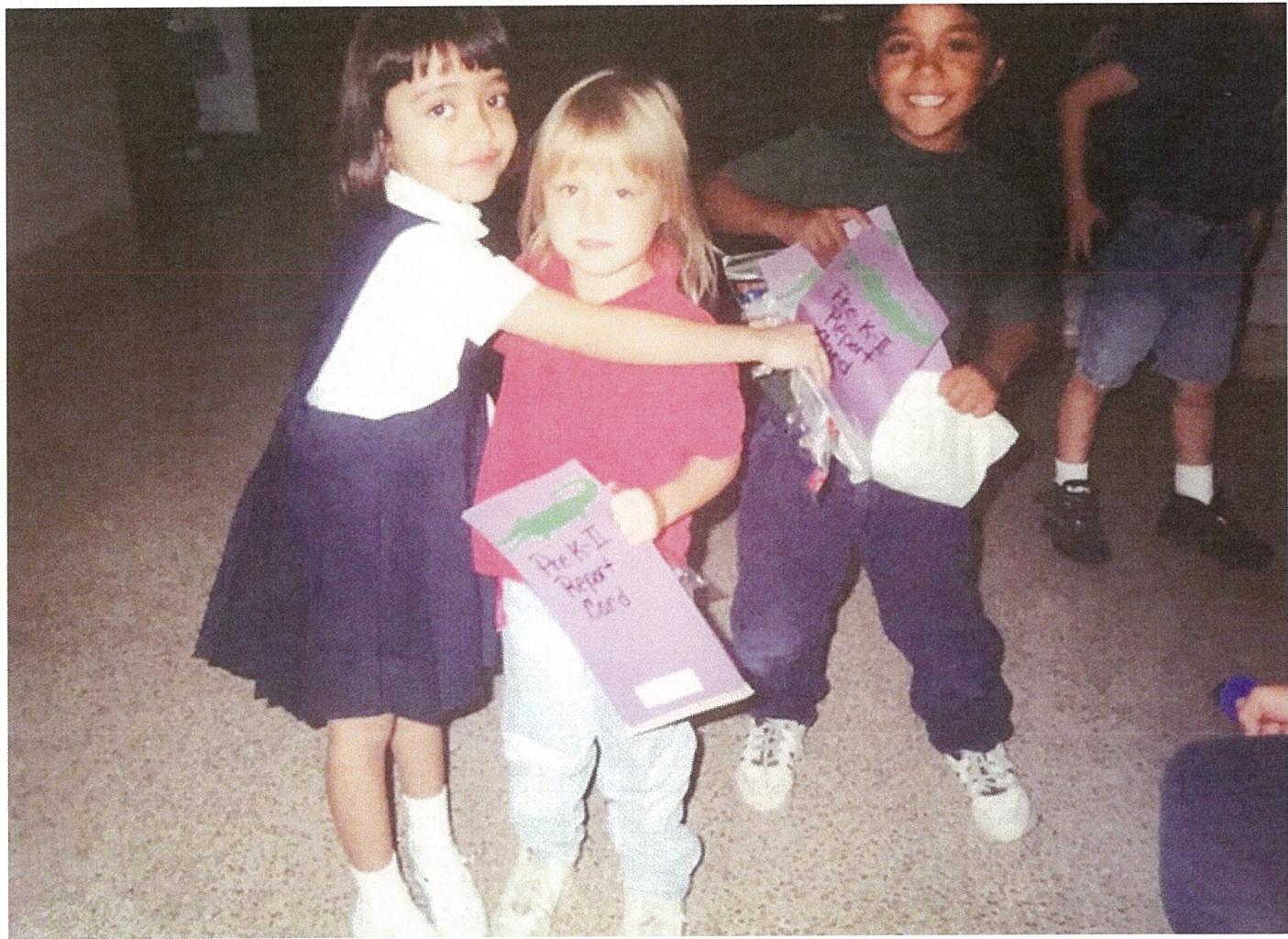
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relate to a bit more. It was a crappy time to find out about it because I was a teenager and we're all angsty anyways and I felt alone.



**Ana (Alaska):** Never among my peers. I think Alaska is pretty weird in that while we may not be the most diverse state, for the most part, people are respectful. I think in bigger places people really dehumanize immigrants and they don't get to know them. [Here], I became a part of the community and was never made to feel less than others, which I think was great, but I'm sure if they knew the truth [about my status] they probably would.



COURTESY OF KARLA PEREZ

Karla Perez on her last day of pre-K with her first school friend.

**Were you ever ashamed of your undocumented status? If so, can you recall some examples?**

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**Karla (Texas):** I felt a lot of shame. [After dropping driver's ed], I obviously had to explain ... to my friends why I wasn't going to be in the class anymore. My mom spoke to their mom and they spoke about it to me. Then it was only those two girls and my best friend who knew about my situation. They would joke about it and say like, "Don't worry, you'll be fine one day. We'll get you papers" or stuff like that but we wouldn't talk about it. And the thing is I had heard those [same] girls say some pretty derogatory comments about people, I guess presuming that they were undocumented. It kind of made me feel like, "Well, I'm like those people that I heard you call wetbacks before" — that made me feel really insecure.

**Ana (Alaska):** Yeah, because I wasn't around a community that was trying to help me grow into a self-awareness about being undocumented and how it's not anything to be ashamed of. I was so cognizant of [my status] from such an early age that it became really tied to who I am and how to hide it. One of the earliest moments when I felt shame was when I was in elementary school or middle school and someone on the bus was saying, "Oh, I memorized my Social Security number" and kids were going back and forth because their parents were trying to teach them how to be responsible. Luckily no one asked me but I just remember thinking, "I'm not going to be able to answer that, ever."

### **Has your family ever fallen into hardships that would have been easily remedied if not for your immigration status?**

**Karla (Texas):** In 2007, my dad lost his job. He and my grandfather and my uncles worked as machinists, they built engines in some place in town that closed. Even though they have a little more education than some other people that I've met, they can't just walk into a business and say, "OK, let me do this accounting job." We had to scramble and he really had to start all over again in terms of work.

**Ana (Alaska):** I think had there been access to legalization for my family our quality of life would be a lot better, because of the differences in jobs that are available. Also health care is really hard [while undocumented]; you have to live life hoping you don't get sick. And for my parents, both of them have had health issues and it's derailed our finances significantly.

### **Why did you decide to come out of the shadows and become an activist?**

**Karla (Texas):** After becoming a DACA beneficiary in the fall of 2012, I saw that there were other people like me. I still wasn't in touch with any of those people but felt the urge to tell my story because I saw other people doing it. Later, I was in the [university's] student lounge one day and I heard a student say, "I'm undocumented and unafraid." I turn around and I'm just like, "Oh, my God!" He was with another student and they were practicing for a speech. I introduced myself and offered to give them some pointers on public speaking and that's how I came across the Youth Empowerment Alliance at the University of Houston. Before I knew it, I was marching, organizing DACA clinics, going to rallies and really starting to learn more about community organizing.

**Ana (Alaska):** I haven't come out of the shadows in Alaska at all. I want to keep my family safe, if it was just me I wouldn't care. [But I'm an activist] because there's too much at stake.

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Now with DACA taken away we have no safety net. It's easy to get comfortable when you feel there's some sort of protection there for you, but when there isn't you start to realize you have to do something because no one is going to care. I've been really inspired by the undocumented youth movement and seeing what they've done not only for themselves but for their community. It's also that feeling of guilt, they're fighting for you and you're just going to sit back?



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COURTESY OF KARLA PEREZ

Karla Perez poses with a #HereToStay sign.

### How did you feel when DACA was announced?

**Karla (Texas):** I was so excited and happy and felt hope for the first time. I know that's what my parents felt as well. After waiting for so long and really feeling like nothing was ever going to come our way, I just felt a lot of hope.

**Ana (Alaska):** I think I had a very different reaction than most people. Maybe I was a teenage brat but I just remember telling my mom, "This is nothing. Yes, it's great but it can be taken away from us and we deserve more."

### What do you think is the greatest misconception about Dreamers?

**Karla (Texas):** The biggest misconception is that everyone is like me, that everyone is this model Dreamer, top of their class, etc. I'm very cognizant of that. People have to understand, I consider myself to be extremely privileged and really grateful for everything that my parents and mentors have helped me with over the years. But not everybody has had the opportunity to go into higher education right away. A lot of people had to start working right away and had to grow up a lot more quickly than others.

Another misconception is that all of us are Latinos or Latinas. I think everyone gets told at one point, "Go back to Mexico." I've heard that said to people who were from Central America or are Filipino, so there's this misconception that everyone is Mexican and ... that's certainly not the case. I have a number of undocumented black and Asian friends.

**Ana (Alaska):** I think one really big misconception is that we're stealing things from Americans. It's not our fault if you haven't achieved your full potential and there's no reason for us to apologize for it. I think the biggest misconception that makes me eternally angry is how people think we don't pay taxes or that we're not contributing into Social Security.

### Do you feel like your state has enough resources to help Dreamers?

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**Karla (Texas):** We live in a huge state whose economy has fared better than a lot of other states. Things could be so much better for the immigrant community and I think for people of color generally. [Just think of] the money the state of Texas has spent appealing and bringing lawsuits in which there has been discriminatory intent found — whether it's voter ID laws, redistricting or even now with the Senate Bill 4 injunction. Our state continues to lead in these ways that are so counter-effective to what can make it even better.

**Ana (Alaska):** Not at all. I think it doesn't even have enough resources to help its documented young people achieve the American dream.

### **What do you think your state still needs to help Dreamers achieve their potential?**

**Karla (Texas):** I think that people can be so supportive of Dreamers like me, but they will throw people like my mom and my dad under the bus, easily. That's what happened with S.B. 4. I think that Texas needs to recognize that it's immigrants like us that have been building the state in so many ways. If you hurt one person in the immigrant community that has a ripple effect, it's not just the devastation for that immediate family but for a community that depends on the love, support, labor and everything that that one immigrant person provides.

**Ana (Alaska):** I think Sen. [Lisa] Murkowski is on the right track. She's one of the first Republican co-sponsors for the Dream Act. I don't think it makes sense for Alaska to provide resources for undocumented youth now that we have a chance to pursue the Dream Act [on a national level].

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DAVID MCNEW VIA GETTY IMAGES

People hold signs over the 110 Freeway in Los Angeles as thousands of immigrants and supporters join the Defend DACA March to oppose President Donald Trump's decision to end DACA.

### What was your reaction to the 2016 election and the results?

**Karla (Texas):** I've been horrified since the first day that this man opened up his campaign saying that people like me were rapists and that Mexico was not sending their best. From that day I've been horrified at how it didn't stop at that day.

[I've seen] some of my United We Dream friends at protests getting spit on, their hair being pulled. I'd get hate tweets from time to time but never like this past year. I've had people tell me, "You're going to be bagged and tagged for removal," like I'm cattle or something.

**Ana (Alaska):** Living in Alaska you have the weird experience where you get to befriend a lot of [Trump supporters]. I think it became easy for me to tell how good people could vote for Trump and rationalize that in their own mind, without really understanding the whole impact. I was devastated, I was heartbroken but I was not surprised.

### Do you ever feel like your mental health has been impacted by your status?

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**Karla (Texas):** During my first year in law school I started seeing a counselor. I'm working on seeing someone again right now, and I'm not the only one. As a teenager, I was certainly sad and upset and frustrated but I now know what depression looks like. My friends and I, because most of my friends are organizers, we check in on each other specifically for this reason, because there's a lot of mental health issues right now. But I never had them before the election, this all really started happening together with the election cycle. From the day that man announced his campaign, it's just been downhill.

**Ana (Alaska):** Oh, yeah, I think it for sure has. I know you're probably referencing that study that came out just showing how DACA helped mental health so much and it totally did. I can see that in myself. It really lets you believe that you're going to have a future. I think being able to plan further than just day-by-day is something that sort of lifts the trauma of having grown up undocumented. When you first had to submit all your records for DACA to prove you've been living in the U.S. for a certain amount of years — a lot of mine were medical records. My mom used to take me to the hospital because I had really bad neck pain or I couldn't sleep or I had migraines. Looking back on it, I think definitely you can tell there's nothing physically probably wrong with me. It's just the trauma of knowing [about my status] from such a young age.

### If you could send Trump and/or Congress a message regarding Dreamers and what they deserve, what would it be?

**Karla (Texas):** I would like to say that my plan of being an immigration attorney and learning the most that I can to prepare for that, my work doing that does not stop. My fate will not be decided by this man and by members of Congress who cannot get it together, because the majority of the American people support the DACA program. We have come so far already, especially those of us who before DACA were so ashamed, were so afraid. At this point in my life I cannot go back to being that ashamed, afraid person. DACA means so much to me but my work permit does not define me or my abilities.

**Ana (Alaska):** It'd probably be: Don't waste our potential and don't ignore the fact that we are Americans. Don't let yourself be written down in history as the people that did this to Americans because it's not going to look good. And I would just say, pass the Dream Act. You have no other choice, you've put yourself in a bind where you said it's going to get done and it has to be. Otherwise, I don't think they understand how all 800,000 of us are American and how we have a community of Americans that are really going to get outraged if they don't do anything in six months.

*These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.*

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**I AM AN** ANTI-ABORTION ACTIVIST, RIHANNA FAN, OVO-LACTO VEGETARIAN I AM AN AMERICAN

**I AM AN** SECOND AMENDMENT ADVOCATE, FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE FAN, AND I AM AN AMERICAN



**Carolina Moreno**   
Reporter, HuffPost

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